

*Between
Development and Culture*



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May God guide us towards the right path.

A. Jirari

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Between Development and Culture

Despite the clarity that one may perceive in the title of this paper and the impression it gives of an easy approach, many difficulties surround it, particularly with regard to the following aspects:

First: The fact of associating two terms that have been extensively seen from different angles as two entirely independent fields;

Second: The disparities in the definitions seeking to determine the gist of these two terms, to the extent where they almost become contradictory.

To overcome difficulties arising from these two aspects and their implications, and seeking an objective approach that would resolve or help resolve this dilemma and the equation inherent to it, or at the very least render it open to analysis and discussion, I believe it is necessary to touch on the prevalent definitions of development and culture.

Development, from the verb 'to develop' refers to the state or process of growing or causing to grow and become more mature, advanced, or elaborate.

For the majority of researchers in this and other relevant or associated fields, this term is associated with the improvement of economic conditions and production, marketing or exchanges, and the resulting financial profits that may benefit to certain social categories or to society at large.

The Arabic word for culture, (الثقافة/thaqafa), on the other hand, has as its root the verb أَثَقَّ، أَثَقَّ which means understanding and mastering knowledge of something, or a process through which an individual becomes skillful and talented at something.

The notion of culture as perceived by the general public and by those evolving in cultural and other circles, limits culture to certain forms of literary or artistic knowledge that are preserved and rehashed and through which some elites -through taste and imagination- entertain and amuse themselves. This reduces culture to the element of leisure and entertainment, a luxury and an indulgence, or at best a complement to more serious and useful knowledge. Under this light, culture is often linked to folklore patterns and is not immune to a negativity that seeks to emphasize the pejorative manifestations of these

patterns.

When we ponder the concept of development and culture -away from common and prevalent perceptions- we find that development is an almost primal and natural phenomenon, starting with a universe that is constantly evolving and perpetually moving forward in a progression that affects all aspects of life, including the creatures living in this universe and reveling in its riches and bounty.

Out of all these creatures, Man is the most appreciative of this truth and draws benefit from all its manifestations, starting with what is dictated by his very existence in this universe, the impulse to progress either through development or change, putting to contribution everything he rediscovers in his surroundings, the cognitions and skills he acquires, the aspirations he strives to fulfill in a peaceful and spontaneous way or, if necessary, through war and violence, regardless of the disasters and losses he may incur and based on which he regulates, reorganizes and renews his relations with the others.

The lives of man and community thus take shape, giving body to institutions that are primarily intent on producing what responds to man's basic needs in agriculture or industry, within the limits needed for living and settling, and before these limits are pushed back to make room for a surplus to be either stocked or marketed.

Gradually, disparities emerge among societies along with inequalities in wealth distribution, the social gap widening depending on whether these societies can or cannot garner self-sufficiency to guarantee their living conditions, along with a surplus to export -and thus amass riches and rise to higher levels of advancement. In the meantime, the other party, the surplus importer, remains forever in need, held back by the shackles of regression.

However, such observation brings to mind what we wrote earlier in that as it progresses and mutates, i.e. expands to broader horizons, development needs to explore the new, acquire knowledge, skills and expertise by applying mind and reason -as well as imagination- to master the processes leading to innovation, i.e. to creativity, and have an immaterial visionary

approach to what can guarantee freedom from the quagmire of regression, particularly poverty, ignorance and disease. Those who master this acquire the ability to reach excellence and rise above the less fortunate who are doomed to endure the weight of backwardness, manifest in their dependency and endurance of want despite their riches and resources, exploited in multiple ways by the advanced.

True development is one of which the impacts reflect positively on countries and citizens. It does not serve the interests of the Other, holder of the key to this development, controlling it and bent on maintaining and nurturing the dependent party's regression. This situation reflects on the civilizational and cultural fields of the two parties -developed and backward-, not only economically, but also politically, socially and culturally, but most particularly those of disadvantaged party. Regardless of the development model this party sets out to emulate, or the ideology it hopes will emancipate it, this only exacerbates its dependency through donations, loans and technical assistance. Even the investments this party perceives as positive development projects that can help him acquire a

productive force and the economic ability to compete with the others or achieve complementarity with them, are in reality an obstacle and a stumbling block.

Yet, engaging in such small projects may help alleviate the hemorrhaging experienced in the resources of underdeveloped countries, labeled as 'developing'. It may help them tackle certain levels of poverty, ignorance and disease and cover the expenses they have to contend with as they face up to disasters or purchase the weapons needed against the threats they face in their endeavor to protect their entities from any security and stability breaches.

Development is essentially any endeavor undertaken by man and society, using their own resources and abilities, and in the full respect of their specificity as the true representatives of their country's wealth, to achieve overall advancement in all aspects and of life at the economic, social and cultural levels. They are able to overcome any imbalance or corruption that may stand in the way, particularly the monopoly exercised by social elites over riches and the proceeds of development. Such monopoly strips development of the human dimension that has come to represent

it when the monopoly or hegemony of these elites is absent and away from any isolation or introversion in stagnation. Development requires openness onto the Other in order to benefit from his progress as he advances, along with development's primary need for knowledge and scientific progress to facilitate the processes of planning and programming that follow well-defined systems and models. These are based on a cultural and civilizational project hinging on the modernization of different bodies and organizations. The creation of such methods calls for sensitization and training efforts that produce competent human resources and build capacities in all fields. In turn, these can help advance and expand all development fields thanks to their creativity and innovation. The wider this expansion and advancement are, the better is the development of a society and its superiority to those who remain dependent on others in these fields.

Emphasis should be laid on openness onto the self with a critical mind, a rational approach and a democratic system, beneficial knowledge and responsible freedom, as well as avoiding the attribution of blame

for regression to the wrong elements such as the ethnic or religious factors or such other pretexts.

While the true causes of regression are multiple and owed in many cases to a society's specific conditions, its nature and the nature of its population, many other factors play a much more significant role. One of these factors is colonial occupation through which the riches of affected nations were usurped, leaving behind many remnants after independence. Most prominent among these is the monopoly held by specific groups or categories over production means, and hence over the proceeds of such production, resulting ultimately in a class system marked by disparities between increasingly rich people and increasingly impoverished poor. The ensuing social inequity and dysfunction soon led to a paralysis of society, particularly when other aspects of life were affected, starting with the loss of the sense of citizenship and ending with a threat to the entity and cohesion of the national edifice.

This calls for a reconsideration of the wealth issue in underdeveloped countries and that is marked by monopoly and inequitable distribution, in addition to

weak governance and lack of accountability. Such conditions reduce the possibilities of creating new production areas with human development objectives promoting initiative and competition and creating employment opportunities that positively impact on population needs, particularly in education, health and employment, as well as other social necessities which, as they stand currently in underdeveloped countries, breed only poverty, ignorance and disease.

Compounding the situation is the issue of training which is failing to bear any fruits due to inadequate educational systems, accumulated problems that have an impact not only on the advance of the state machine, but also on citizens and the mentality that conditions their behavior and their relationships. These failings weaken their efficiency in work and production and contribute to the spread of different forms of inadequacy such as bad service, rampant corruption and greed for quick profit even if illicit, excessive consumption that exceeds one's means and the resulting indebtedness, whether of the State or of individuals.

These factors are often associated with the extent of improvisation when it comes to decision-making, which undermines the worth of personal initiatives, no matter how small or limited they are. It generates frustrations and a lack of confidence in the self, in others and in the country as a whole, which in turn consecrates the conditions and effects of underdevelopment.

We may conclude from this comparison that development is not merely economic as is commonly perceived or as underdeveloped countries are meant to understand and accept, but is instead as global as man's needs and their sustainability, evolving within a context of complementarity, symbiosis, balance, harmony and concord, and in line with the values Man upholds, his immaterial capabilities in the form of thought, literature, art, intelligence, experience, skills and good morals. Add to this confidence in the self and in society, in the existence of a firm justice and good governance with a credibility that guarantees rights and obligations, starting with responsible freedom and decent living. All of this would be conducive to man's productivity and continuous creativity in ways that

fulfill his aspirations and help him soar towards wider and brighter horizons.

It is worth our while to recall the critical speech of His Majesty King Mohamed VI on the occasion of Throne Day (30 July 2014), underscoring the importance of the immaterial capital and the need to put this capital to contribution in bringing about sustainable global development.

This emphasis prompts us to ponder the essence of culture which comes at the forefront of all things immaterial, if it is not their essence and sum. Culture is what confers on man awareness of his existence and his future in this universe, to live, experience and drive this existence, or even own it and dispose of it from a clear vision that takes body in thought, action and behavior.

There is no doubt that such approach and vision can only occur through a sound and beneficial upbringing that provides young generations with a good education that prepares them to shoulder responsibilities, without alienation or deviation, armed instead with knowledge. This knowledge is based on scientific research that touches all development areas, is carried out in line

with a clearly laid out academic process that capable universities sponsor, fund and encourage as opposed to leaving all research endeavors in the hands of qualified individuals whose efforts, no matter how earnest and commendable, will always remain, due to their limited means and resources, unable to achieve the desired sustainable development goals and fulfill the development and progress hopes pinned on them.

These hopes cannot be fulfilled, or even controlled, except through a future project undertaken within the framework of the aforementioned scientific policy and serving as the foundation of every modernization endeavor. Intellectuals should hasten to adopt this project, particularly young scholars from all disciplines who are capable of formulating such project through a new, eloquent and convincing discourse, motivated by their sense of identity and belonging, with faith in their constants and deeply-seated values, and with openness that does not alienate them from their identity. They remain attached to this identity, able to express it in myriad ways, confident in the inevitability of an awakening after the stumble of regression affecting society and that has no place in a world of

globalization that is unforgiving to those unable to cope with it in a participatory way, with a significant contribution and through the ever evolving communication means.

We can approach culture from this angle, or rather the cultural identity as a civilizational phenomenon continuously evolving in tandem with society's evolution, and the changes and mutations that occur in social and economic conditions, capable of interacting with other events in a two-way process, far from any hegemony or imposed dependency. Were this to happen, it would have a profound impact on these conditions. There is indeed no denying that cultural identity is defined by the time and space or context in which it emerges. It is highly diverse and multiple, this having the greatest effect on the different economic fields, social systems and behavior patterns, and the ensuing mindset and mentality.

However, leaning this way as we speak of cultural identity should not cause us to neglect other elements such as identity in its broader sense, and most importantly religion and language and their manifestations. Each of these, language and religion, plays a crucial role in

the assertion of existence, in highlighting the symbolism of identity, is shaping the Ummah's cultural and civilizational heritage, as long as religious moderation and tolerance are given the position they warrant, away from any radicalism or bigotry, and as long as language is regarded not as a mere tool for expression and communication, but as an instrument of knowledge, of thought and of creativity.

With this and other components of identity, culture is the shield protecting the entity, preserving unity, providing protection against shocks and crises, along with its primary role of defining visions and stances, guiding and redressing plans and programs within a comprehensive review of all systems and all political, economic and social affairs.

For culture to shoulder this responsibility it needs to gain strength -through a sound national education- and with the help of today's knowledge and sciences and the positive developments in modern information and communication technologies. It also needs to broaden its scope by opening up to other cultures and ensuring interaction with and contribution to these cultures. This would keep it perpetually capable of

renewal not only through imitation and inspiration, but also through good quality production and outstanding creativity in various fields of science, literature and art.

This renewal trend, relying on an outlook to these times' innovations and modernity elements, does not mean ignoring that culture is the Ummah's living and valuable heritage, in its academic and folkloric forms and with its architectural landmarks. Culture represents the historical memory to be presented to generations as authentic, unequivocal and misconception-free. In respect of this, information's role becomes crucial and decisive in asserting identity and entrenching its values and components, in avoiding any negative points that have weighed down the Ummah and were endured throughout the times of weakness and regression, pushing it into seclusion and dark ruminations, prisoner of the past and hostage of imitation.

Our Moroccan culture, and Arab and Islamic in general, suffers from a structural regression that is further exacerbated by illiteracy, and compounded by academic and scientific failure and the schizophrenia that has affected thought, emotions, expressions and

behavior at the individual and general levels. The result is a social dysfunction of which the repercussions would be dire if it is not quickly remedied to. Such remedy is still possible as long as this culture has a heartbeat, especially in today's circumstances where Morocco, under the leadership of His Majesty the King, enjoys a degree of peace and stability hard to encounter in other friendly and brotherly countries plagued by unrest and troubles, even if the current circumstances are forcing Morocco to exercise more caution and alertness.

Regrettably, the cultural element remains absent from development in these conditions. This absence further compounds underdevelopment, as clearly seen in the disparity between advanced and underdeveloped countries, not only in terms of weak economic conditions, lack of productivity and continued status as the hostages of better achievers, but also of the cultural progress witnessed in these countries and its absence in underdeveloped ones. The consequences of such failings take body in the intellectual and psychological suffering of these peoples who in most cases had been colonized in the past, and continue to experience Western hegemony

which tyrannically imposes its cultural orientations and is unable to shed the complex of the occupier that enabled it to attract others to its superior culture. The same complex is driving the backward dependents to blindly imitate this culture without realizing the difference between an advanced culture that has embarked on modernity and set out to conquer and rule, and another culture that is still reeling under the burden of regression.

Speaking of these trends brings us back to the question on their advocates and champions, diverse in their leanings as they may be. What concerns us primarily is the intellectual per se, i.e. in the broad sense of the word and what connotation it presumably carries in the sense of a legacy, values and principles, sharp acumen, profound awareness, enlightened mind, responsible freedom, live conscience, and determination and ability to engage in an objective critique. This critique would be aimed at building self-assertion with neither self-glorification nor self-flagellation, but with the ability to take initiative, confront internal and external challenges, in symbiosis with all classes of society, either directly or through creations and stances.

This synergy with society enables the intellectual to keep pace with his society's developments and the mutations of its causes, identify with it through effective contributions and without confusing visions or cards, without tension and dilemma before a confusing duality, or applying rigid acceptance or rejection criteria based on binary oppositions. This primarily means the rejection of isolation and introversion which are likely to minimize the role of the intellectual, prevent him from accomplishing his mission, or cause him to lose hope in this accomplishment, either spontaneously or in reaction to multiple pressures, causing him to falter or fear reality and what this reality holds in the way of corruption and dysfunction that favor despair and frustration. Once in this state, the intellectual becomes a problem and an impediment, a hoarse voice whispering in the constricted space to which he confines himself, unable to find someone to hear or listen to him. In the best case scenario, the intellectual becomes a mere slogan brandished and chanted in the march of development, a hollow slogan that has no impact and is only resorted to for recommendation, justification, and pacification.

When the intellectual plays an efficient and influential role in the development process, he must have full control over his tools and act as a partner in shouldering responsibilities in all pride and dignity, neither sidelined nor marginalized or the victim of a marginalization conspiracy. Thanks to his intellectual potentialities and capacities, he is capable of engaging in an accurate critical diagnosis of reality, intent on further enhancing and promoting its advantages and banishing its flaws. This only becomes feasible when he embarks on a mission to edify society and State through a new vision of the future, and by planning and implementing such future visions, and paving the way for their implementation by the managers of public affairs and those holding technical expertise in their own fields. Intellectuals may participate along with them in this implementation on aspects where they have an edge, credibility and efficacy, and where they perceive the possibility of matching reality to dream, unaffected by any conflict that may be provoked between the other parties. These parties will have to shed the cloak of complaints and whining, and renounce any egoistic and individualist tendencies, and to work,

together, in solidarity and tolerance and with a genuine patriotic spirit.

Once this becomes possible, development in its broad human sense can be achieved. As previously said, development does not hinge entirely upon economic and financial progress with its inherent reliance on material means and instruments, but should instead be founded on a close synergy and fusion with the immaterial human element founded on thought and creativity, which element is embodied and crystallized by culture with its profound impact on development.

To conclude this paper, and for culture to capably shoulder this role, it must be regarded as a sum of knowledge, passion, ethics and ability to produce and assimilate, with willingness to give and take. This means a global culture that builds awareness through knowledge and through its mission, nurtures a sense of the self, of life and of others, helps understand the true gist of man and universe, absorbs problems and concerns through analysis and critique, finding solutions, striking a balance between all interests, and limiting the absolute power of the matter as well as the pure power of the mind.

Culture thus becomes a crucial element in production and can effectively alter the reality of regression, starting with the formulation of conceptions, planning development programs, laying key economic and social structures and developing them into a framework for both the producer and the consumer, ultimately becoming another component in the drive to build the human being, adapt this reasoning and nurture his psyche.

The existence of such framework could bring about the rapprochement of advanced and underdeveloped societies, bridge the immense gap between them, diminish the powerful rule of materialism over Man, and consolidate, at least to a certain limit, the cultural values founded on justice and equity, as well as other values that bring about pride and dignity.

There is no sense in development if it is not harnessed to serve man, raising his educational, cognitive and behavioral level, i.e. his cultural level, and positively impacting his life and effective and efficient existence within society. This not only makes Man the pivot of the development process, but most importantly, the true capital thanks to whose thought, innovation and efforts the material and immaterial

prerequisites of this development can be met.

A fair share of the responsibility lies with the managers of public affairs. This calls for drawing their attention to its importance and to grant it the attention that would serve development through all forms of culture. This includes the local development addressed earlier in the context of explaining the impact of culture on identity and of which the positive forms must be kept in mind since they showcase cultural wealth and diversity in all harmony, balance, solidarity and integration. It is equally important to avoid those forms that are derogatory, distortive or denigrating and that may exist for the sole purpose of entertainment and distraction, or for provocation, sensationalism or shocking by spreading moral dissolution, permissiveness, charlatanism and myths.

This said, we must not ignore the correct religious and spiritual concepts associated with to culture and kept pure and untainted thanks to the moderation and balance of religion, in building a true development project with a novel forward-looking vision. This vision would take into consideration local and international political, economic and social developments, away

from ethnic and sectarian strife and doctrinal and partisan conflicts that hinder the perception of true reality and the way of addressing it, and obscure the need to confront life's challenges, leading ultimately to violent conflicts that soon evolve into destructive wars.

Cf. other writings by the author on the same subject in the following books:

1. *Culture in the Battle of Change*, Dar al-Nashr al-Maghribiyya, Casablanca, August 1972.

2. *Culture: from Identity to Dialogue*, Dar al-Hilal al-Arabiyya, Rabat, June 1993, publications of al-Jirari Club, No. 3.

3. *The Self and the Other*, Arabic and French versions, Oumnia Printers, Rabat, April 1998, Publications of al-Jirari Club, No. 13.

4. *Remnants of Writings on Culture*, Arabic and French versions, Oumnia Printers, Rabat, April 1999, Publications of al-Jirari Club, No. 17.

5. *The Desired Reform*, Arabic and French versions, Oumnia Printers, Rabat, July 2005, Publications of al-Jirari Club, No. 33.

6. *National and Regional Identity*, Arabic, French and English versions, Dar Salam Printers, Rabat, December 2013, Publications of al-Jirari Club, No. 59.

7. *Culture of Reform and the Reform of Culture*, Arabic, French and English versions, Dar Salaam Printers, Rabat, December 2011, Publications of al-Jirari Club, No. 54.